HIGH COUNTRY RUNNING

Records smashed at Babbitt's Backyard

BY DAWN STONE
Special to the Daily Sun

What's the Backyard race craze taking fire throughout the world?

Lazarus Lake, iconic inventor of the Barkley Marathons, invented the Backyard — a race broken down into 4.167-mile loops, with each athlete required to complete one loop per one hour until only one person is left standing.

Babbitt's Backyard Ultra has taken place on Billy Cordasco's Babbitt Ranch since 2020. We feel grateful for their sponsorship and the use of the Babbitt's Backcountry store downtown for athlete check-in. Also want to give a grateful shout-out to Chris Thornley, another local sponsor and Squirrels Nut Butter inventor of skin chafing prevention salve, who manned the time clock and whistle for the start/finish.

This year, in its sixth edition, our race records were smashed in both the male and female category. Ryan Snickles of Chandler completed 55 hours/laps (229.185 miles), and Stephanie Rosebaugh of Prescott completed 38 hours/laps (158.346 miles).

At the beginning of the event, the athlete excitement and chatter were apparent, with people telling stories and bonding.

While a Backyard event is competitive, there is a greater sense of camaraderie, with athletes often going from mere acquaintances to friend to family.

This year we began with 35 athletes, but after 3 hours/laps (12.5 miles) the Backyard journey came to an end for a few. Morning turned to afternoon, barbeque burgers, hotdogs and vegan options were grilling, music on Chris's party box 310 was playing and local photographer Steve Montgomery sat near the finish. A group of us anticipated the athlete order as completion of the loops progressed.

Snickles (2022 champion), Cody McKesson, Larry Phoenix, Benjamin Kammin and Brian Smith (2024 champion) were all looking strong, and we could see the strategy was running deep within the athletes. Efficient loops — not too fast or slow.

Twelve hours into the race, night began to creep over the ranch (50.004 miles completed) and we lost a group of racers. Eighteen of the 35 athletes were left. Hot soup, electrolytes, fuel, headlamps and jackets were intermittently worn as we experienced a few minutes of drizzling rain, but then got lucky with a starry night until sunrise. Eight runners progressed into the 25th hour/lap: day two.

Tim McKenzie, a repeat Babbitt's competitor, ended the event after 29 hours/laps (120.843 miles) appearing content to concede.

Five athletes continued deep into the second night, working together and gaining laps — which overall helped add their names to Laz's world "At Large" list of competitors.

At 48 hours/laps (200 miles) there were three competitors standing: Stephen Glod of Utah looked strong throughout the race but took his race-ending ribbon.

Then there were two: Snickles and McKesson. They were determined to work together, progressing laps and lengthening their success as a team. One mission of a Backyard event is to work together to progress each other's event. There has to be a team of at least two competitors to progress forward; once there's only one athlete to complete a loop, the event is over.

Upon the 54th hour/lap, McKesson made his way into the start/finish in apparent discomfort. He barely completed the loop, with only 30 seconds to spare before having to start the next. We could tell something was amiss, but he continued, progressing another lap with Snickles. Soon after starting the loop, McKesson displayed a physical barrier, with his Achilles no longer allowing progression. He turned back and called his race: 54 hours/laps (225.018 miles) — an amazing accomplishment!

Snickles continued the 54th hour/lap, and at 55 hours/laps (229.185 miles), he claimed the overall win and event record.

He will get to compete at the USA Team Satellite Championships in October 2026 in Tennessee at Bigs Backyard, Laz's racecourse!

__Dawn Stone__ has been the director of Babbitt's Backyard Ultra since 2022. __Rachel Smith__ is the coordinating editor for the High Country Running column. You can email her at rachschneid18@gmail.com to contribute to this column.

SPARTANS

FROM PAGE 1

goalkeeper. The striker, who had 28 goals last season, felt like he got into a rhythm early.

"It was just a team effort," Fergason said. "Our whole team played really well. I'm proud of myself and really proud of my team."

NPA appeared to have taken the lead moments later, but a goal scored by senior Joseph Tognacci from a deflection on a Fergason shot was waived off by an offside call. The Spartans were called offside on multiple occasions and had two goals taken off the board in the first half from those calls.

"Offside (calls) are always frustrating, especially on a small field like Peaks View Field," Batrez Cardoza said. "The players, I can only tell them to watch the line or watch their run, but at the end of the day, it's easier said than done."

Fergason broke free and beat the goalkeeper to give the Spartans the lead with less than 10 minutes remaining before halftime.

"Ultimately, if we lost the game, it wouldn't have been the refs' fault," Fergason said. "It would have been our fault."

Seconds before the halftime whistle blew, Cowboys sophomore Emanuel Tema nailed a free kick into the net from near midfield to tie it up at the break.

Due to the match's late start, the sunset started to be a factor. Heavy cloud cover added to the darkness that crept over in the late stages.

"It's tough for anybody to see," Batrez Cardoza said. "I was getting a little nervous. I couldn't see, and the boys were the ones looking for the ball. I was just really ready for the time to run out, but we adjusted pretty well to finish it off."

Camp Verde retook the lead to start the second half. Junior Diego Miranda scored from the deep right corner of the field to give the Cowboys a 3-2 lead, surpassing the most goals NPA has allowed in regular-season play all year.

Fergason began a stretch of three unanswered goals individually just moments later after drawing a foul inside the penalty box. He secured his hat trick less than five minutes into the second half, sending his penalty shot to the right side of the net.

The senior star gave his Spartans the lead again by dribbling the ball around the Cowboys goalkeeper to take a 4-3 lead.

The complexion of the match really changed in the final 10 minutes. Tena was dealt a red card after tackling a Spartans attacker on a clear path to the goal. On the ensuing free kick, Fergason fired the ball off the goalkeeper, and it bounced into the net.

Long strikes continued to be the bane of NPA's defense. Junior Pedro Delgado sneaked a strike from deep into the top-left corner of the net. Down one goal, the Cowboys were frantic in trying to get one more good look to even the match, but the Spartans held them off to secure their ninth straight victory to end the regular season.

NPA (11-1, 6-0 Fall North) secured the top spot in the region standings as Fall North's only unbeaten team in region play. The Spartans' only regular season loss came at the hands of defending state runner-up Snowflake on Sept. 5. The Lobos also defeated the Spartans at the Longhorn Invitational in Payson before the start of the regular season.

The Spartans will take their season-defining winning streak into the state tournament after missing the playoffs last year. NPA will await its seeding and matchup. The first round of the eight-team tournament is set for Tuesday, with the higher seed hosting.

The higher remaining seeds will host the semifinal round on Thursday before the championship game on Nov. 1 at Coronado High School.

"We've worked hard as coaches all season to bring this team to where they are," Batrez Cardoza said. "It's not just our effort. It's their effort to show up to practice, show up to games and score the goals that they do."

Camp Verde (8-5-1, 5-2 Fall North) entered Wednesday as winners in five of its previous six matches.

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